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Foreword: Dedicated Issue – Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

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DEDICATED ISSUE

Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary

Foreword

Flower gardens on the bottom of the ocean? This is a confusing name to those who have not been to the Flower Garden Banks National Marine Sanctuary (FGBNMS) coral reefs. However, these rich and colorful undersea islands literally blossom with life in the open sea 100 miles offshore in the Northwestern Gulf of Mexico. Little known several decades ago, they are widely recognized today as some of the best known and monitored coral reefs in the world. Their offshore, remote location, as well as cooperative stewardship, has assisted with the past health of these reefs. However, as is the case all over the world, increased stress and pressure from changing environmental conditions requires continued monitoring and diligence if we are to maintain their health.

Although the reefs of the FGBNMS are isolated and remote, they are also connected: connected geologically in their origin to the past development of the Gulf of Mexico Basin; connected biologically and geographically by genetics and distributional linkages to Mexican and Caribbean coral reefs; and connected environmentally to the mainland watersheds and rest of the Gulf of Mexico by a dynamic ocean circulation system. Therefore, we cannot just hold on to the relatively small area of the FGBNMS but to the larger Gulf in our thinking and planning for sustainable use and conservation for future generations. A multitude of users and stakeholders are coming together from around the entire large marine ecosystem of the Gulf of Mexico because of this connectivity.

The new Harte Research Institute for Gulf of Mexico Studies (HRI) at Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi is working trinationally with users and stakeholders in the United States, Mexico, and Cuba on the sustainable use and conservation of the Gulf of Mexico. As a recently endowed science and policy research institute, HRI intends to work cooperatively and collaboratively with partners around the Gulf. The Pew Oceans Commission and the U.S. Commission on Ocean Policy (USCOP) have laid out a plan for taking better care of our oceans and its resources. The USCOP encourages a regional focus of our new ocean stewardship, and the model of the science-based management demonstrated by FGBNMS is a good one to follow region-wide in the Gulf of Mexico.

Enjoy this next round of continued scientific study, monitoring, and management, and thanks to these dedicated authors for their continued commitment and refinement of our knowledge of this unique ecosystem. This new issue dedicated to the FGBNMS builds upon the previous dedicated issue in *Gulf of Mexico Science (Vol. 16:2, 1998)* and makes new science readily available for science-based management of this critically important Gulf of Mexico resource.

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